

Cruz nearly tied with Trump in Iowa, Speaker Ryan's House honeymoon is over, and civil asset forfeiture eclipses burglary in value: US national blog round up for 21 – 27 November

USAPP Managing Editor, Chris Gilson looks at the best in political blogging from around the Beltway. Our roundup of state political blogging will follow over the weekend.

Jump to

[Elections and the road to 2016](#)

[The Democrats' 2016 campaign](#)

[The Republican Party's 2016 campaign](#)

[Government, the Beltway and Congress' agenda](#)

[Foreign policy, defense and trade](#)

[Obamacare and health policy](#)

[The economy and society](#)

President Obama, the Democratic Party, and the GOP



Credit: Official White House Photo by Pete Souza

On Monday this week, *The Atlantic* [looks](#) at why President Obama is standing by Syrian refugees despite severe criticism from the conservative right. They argue that Obama has been unyielding on refugees – often splitting with his own party – because he is speaking to history, and he feels that his fight is a moral one in the tradition of past struggles for equal opportunity and citizenship in the face of bigotry. On issues such as this, Republicans' hatred of Obama is unabashed. *America* [blog says](#) that this hatred this week even extended to opposition for his traditional pardoning of turkeys for Thanksgiving – 38 percent oppose the poultry pardon.

This week *Powerline* [says](#) that the Democratic Party has unveiled a new strategy – taking unpopular positions. They comment that recent statements from the party, such as criticising the GOP for talking about 'radical Islamic terrorism'

and opposing calls to prevent Syrian refugees from coming to the US actually goes against public opinion – something that may end up hurting the party at the polls in 2016. The Democrats must be doing something right – Saturday saw Democrat John Bel Edwards win the governorship of Louisiana, beating Republican Senator David Vitter by 32 points. *The Fix* [says](#) that Edwards was able to win mostly because he was up against one of the most ‘seriously flawed candidates’; Vitter had been linked to prostitutes in his time in Washington, and was unable to effectively attack Edwards.

Turning now to the GOP, *Political Animal* examines why the party has become so hostile. They reckon that it’s down to the party losing many of its Black and Hispanic voters in recent years, which has led to the party’s much more aggressive rhetoric aimed at gaining more white voters. *Wonkblog*, meanwhile, [looks](#) at how racism helps to explain the Republican Party’s rise in the south. They say that the Democrats’ support of civil rights legislation in the 1960s led to its loss of power in the South.

Elections and the road to 2016

On Tuesday, *The Fix* gives us a [preview](#) of what the Congressional map of 2020 might look like. According to a new analysis of population changes, seven southern and western states will gain one seat, and nine in the Midwest and Northeast may lose one. The trends may help the GOP to win the Electoral College – if they are able to shore up their falling share of the Hispanic vote. On Wednesday, they check in with three political historians to look at whether or not the 2016 presidential election is [unprecedented](#). The answer? It is. Sort of.

The Democrats’ 2016 campaign

Hillary Clinton



Credit: Hillary for America (Flickr, CC-BY-NC-SA-2.0)

The current Democratic front-runner and former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, was in the news this week, and most of the coverage was relatively negative:

- Clinton was looking ahead to the primaries this week, campaigning for the first time in Tennessee ([Post Politics](#)).
- Did Clinton release her ‘inner redneck’ while campaigning in Memphis? ([Red State](#))
- Apparently Clinton’s plan to pay for all of her new policy proposals, such as a \$6,000 tax credit for home caregivers, consists of new and unspecified taxes ([Hit & Run](#)).
- *Powerline* [says](#) that a new poll shows that virtually all the GOP’s candidates beat Hillary Clinton in a presidential match-up.
- Clinton’s ideas on how to defeat ISIS are just as flawed and incoherent as everyone else’s ([Outside the Beltway](#)).

- If Obamacare goes into a death spiral due to insurance companies exiting health insurance exchanges, will President Clinton be able to save it? ([Hit & Run](#)).

The Republican Party's 2016 campaign

Many have argued that the candidacy of billionaire real-estate mogul, Donald Trump, shows that presidential nominations have changed. *Monkey Cage* disagrees, [commenting](#) that Trump could have mounted a similar campaign decades ago, and that his current prominence is a product of his celebrity status and the GOP's failure to embrace one candidate.

On Tuesday, *Political Animal* takes a [look](#) at the State of the Race for the GOP presidential nomination. They comment that Donald Trump is holding steady, retired neurosurgeon Ben Carson is going down, Florida Senator Marco Rubio is regaining ground, Senator Ted Cruz (TX) is up, and former Florida Governor, Jeb Bush, is heading down. They also say that in the 'insurgent' lane, Trump is beating Carson, while in the 'establishment' lane, Rubio is beating Bush.

Roll Call's Rothenblog [writes](#) this week that the GOP candidates' speaking styles say volumes about them. They write that Carson lacks the intensity of other candidates, and that this resonates with voters. Marco Rubio, by contrast sometimes 'appears to be on autopilot', with a less natural and authentic style.

Post Politics [says](#) that at a recent GOP campaign event, rather than trashing each other, seven candidates took turns to bash President Obama. They comment that the event shows that the GOP's candidates are actually able to disagree without being disagreeable. Candidate's politeness aside, the coming months will see some real battles for GOP voters as we head into the primaries. *The Fix* [writes](#) that Ben Carson and Ted Cruz are 'at war' for the evangelical vote, and *Outside the Beltway* [reckons](#) that Trump and Cruz are headed for an 'inevitable' showdown as the latter pulled closer to him in new Iowa polling.

One major piece of fallout from Trump's campaign dominance is the weeding out of governors from the primary race says *Townhall*. Scott Walker of Wisconsin, Rick Perry of Texas, and more recently, Louisiana's Bobby Jindal have all exited the race without voters really getting a chance to vet their competence.

Donald Trump

It was a tumultuous week for the New York billionaire, with Trump staying very much in the headlines:

- The GOP nomination race is still the Trump show, especially at the state level ([Outside the Beltway](#)).
- It looks like the Republican Party may now be the Trump show as well, given that his rhetoric seems to be what voters want ([Political Animal](#))
- In suggesting that they could be closed, Trump doesn't understand that American mosques are places of religious worship ([The Atlantic](#))...
- ... and his proposals to set up a national registry for Muslims could also end up backfiring on Christians ([The Atlantic](#)).
- How the Paris attacks have only made Trump stronger ([The Fix](#))...
- ...and how anti-immigrant attitudes are fuelling support for him ([Monkey Cage](#)).
- Trump recalled this week scenes of cheering and celebration in Jersey City, New Jersey, after 9/11 – something which never actually happened ([FreakOutNation](#)).

- Four theories about why Trump's falsehoods aren't hurting him – people want to believe him, don't care (or aren't paying attention), and believe him over the media ([The Fix](#)).
- Trump has admitted that he actually does not fact-check his own tweets ([Outside the Beltway](#)).
- If elected president, Trump reckons that it is 'extremely unlikely' that he would use nuclear weapons whilst in office ([Daily Kos](#)) ...
- ...though he does seem to be a big fan of using waterboarding on terrorism suspects – whether the tactic works or not ([Post Politics](#)).



Donald Trump Credit: Gage Skidmore (Creative Commons BY SA)

- If Trump's critics want to dislodge him from the top of the GOP primary, they need to attack his tough stance on immigration, and point out that he has flip-flopped on the issue ([The Atlantic](#)).
- That said, the GOP's attempts to 'Get Trump' may well be doomed to fail from the get-go ([Townhall](#)).
- If Trump does not gain the nomination, he once again has not ruled out a third party candidacy ([Post Politics](#)).
- Trump reckons that a protestor at one of his rallies 'should have been roughed up' ([Post Politics](#)).
- Despite his national popularity, trump is actually being out-pollled in New Hampshire by 2012 GOP presidential candidate, Mitt Romney ([Powerline](#)).
- On Thursday, Trump came under harsh criticism for mocking a New York Times reported, Serge Kovalski for having a disability ([Post Politics](#))...
- ... though Trump later claimed he was not mocking Kovalski ([FreakOutNation](#)).

Ben Carson

Moving on to the second-ranked GOP primary candidate in the polls, Ben Carson:

- Carson evidently thinks that being against waterboarding is a form of 'political correctness' ([Crooks & Liars](#)).
- Carson also praised Thomas Jefferson for 'crafting the Constitution' (he had no part in its drafting) ([FreakOutNation](#)).



Dr. Ben Carson Credit: Gage Skidmore (Flickr, CC-BY-SA-2.0)

- While Trump stayed firm, Carson backpedalled on his claim that he too had seen cheering crowds in New Jersey after 9/11 ([Crooks & Liars](#)).
- It may already be too late for Carson to catch up on his presidential ‘homework’ ([Townhall](#)).

Jeb Bush

- Despite his supporters spending \$20 million in TV commercials in the 2016 race thus far, Jeb Bush's poll numbers are still stuck around 5 percent ([Red State](#)).
- Things are bad for Bush – and they’re getting worse ([The Fix](#)).

Marco Rubio

- Marco Rubio stirred confusion this week when he stated that ‘God’s rules always win’ in reference to same-sex marriage rights, which left some conservative voters wondering if he believes laws in that area should be upheld or ignored ([Post Politics](#)).
- Along with the GOP establishment, Rubio has set his sights on Texas Senator Ted Cruz, who recently voted to rein in the National Security Agency’s data collection efforts ([Red State](#)).

Cruz, Paul, and the rest

- Now virtually tied with Trump in Iowa, is Ted Cruz the new GOP favorite? ([Red State](#))
- Favorite or not, Cruz has scored lowest on a recent evaluation of the accuracy of candidates’ statements on climate change ([Crooks & Liars](#)).
- Some good news for former Hewlett-Packard CEO, Carly Fiorina – she is the best polling GOP candidate among conservative Millennials ([Red State](#)).
- New Jersey Governor, Chris Christie’s ‘boomlet’ is not all that it’s cracked up to be ([The Fix](#)).
- Post-Paris, Christie’s ‘tough guy’ foreign policy stances are now in the spotlight ([Post Politics](#)).

Government, the Beltway and Congress’ agenda

On Sunday this week, *Federal Eye* [says](#) that even small bonuses which have been awarded to federal employees who have had disciplinary issues are an image problem for the government, and add fuel to the narrative which undermines the federal workforce. They cite the example of the Social Security Administration which apparently paid performance awards of \$145,000 to 240 staff who had been disciplined for misconduct. Further adding to the negative impression of government is *Hit & Run’s* [report](#) of mere demotions for two senior officials in the Department of Veterans Affairs who had abused their positions of authority for their own personal benefit.

The Atlantic [writes](#) Tuesday that the new Speaker, Paul Ryan (R-WI) has succumbed to the House of Representative's 'broken' rules, despite vowing to fix them prior to taking the Speakership. They report that Ryan has laid his promise of putting legislative power back in the hands of rank and file members by bringing the American SAFE Act to the floor without committee hearings or opportunities for amendments from House members. *Crooks & Liars* [says](#) that Ryan's honeymoon as

Speaker is already over, after 1/3rd of House Republicans signed a letter calling on party leaders to ensure the SAFE Act would block the use of federal funding to resettle refugees from Syria. If passed, such language would put the bill at odds with President Obama. Staying in the House, *Outside the Beltway* has the [news](#) that a former staffer on the House Select Committee investigating the 2012 attacks on the US diplomatic outpost in Benghazi, Libya has filed a lawsuit against the committee for terminating him, and is also suing the Committee Chair, Trey Gowdy (R-SC), for defamation.

Moving on to the Senate, *The Daily Signal* [says](#) on Monday that Senator Chuck Schumer (D-NY) has promised to renew a push for passing sweeping gun control legislation in 2016.

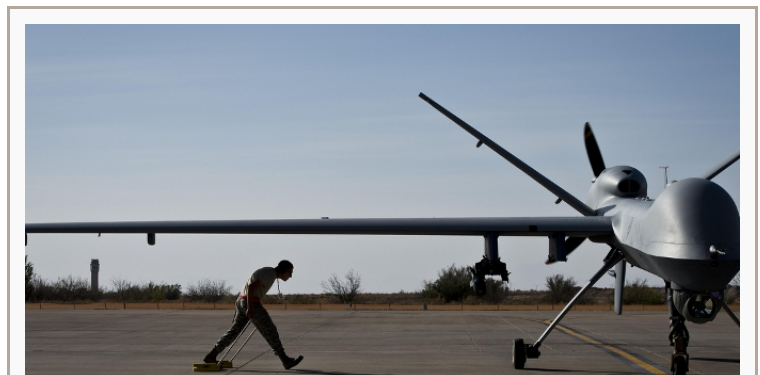


Speaker Paul Ryan Credit: Gage Skidmore (Creative Commons BY SA)

Foreign policy, defense and trade

On Monday this week, *Townhall* weighs in on US drone policy, calling it '[just plain dumb](#)'. They comment that US drones used during the Obama Administration have killed more innocent civilians than mass shooters have domestically.

With all the current controversy over Syrian refugees coming to the US, *The American Interest* [looks](#) to the past for lessons of previous US refugee failures. They say that no-one is listening to the pro-immigration side now for the same reasons that it was ignored in the late 1930s; then, as now, people were just not very accepting of immigrants and refugees. In a similar vein, *Political Violence @ a Glance* [examines](#) that they say are the 'puzzling aspects' of the US debate over Syrian refugees. They comment that the existing 1-2 year refugee screening program would likely catch any terrorist who tried to enter the country, and that there is little evidence of refugees committing terrorist attacks in the US in any case.



Credit: US Air Force (Flickr CC-BY-NC-2.0)

On Tuesday, *Daily Kos* [reports](#) that President Obama, after meeting with French President Francois Hollande this week, stated that ISIS 'must be destroyed' – though he still does not endorse deploying US ground troops or joining an anti-ISIS coalition which would include Russia. *Political Animal*, meanwhile, talks on Obama's [containment strategy](#) against ISIS, writing that part of it is allowing ISIS to fail from its own internal problems and to wait for it to run out of steam economically.

Informed Comment [looks](#) at an interesting study Wednesday which tracks two decades' worth of polling data on Islamophobia, finding that people are more wary of Islam and Muslims when the US is at war overseas.

Obamacare and health policy

On Sunday, *Red State* [reports](#) that as some health insurance providers are potentially looking to end their involvement in Obamacare's health insurance exchanges, the Department of Health and Human Security has stated that Obamacare is 'too big to fail', and that it will cover insurers' losses. *United Liberty* meanwhile [argues](#) that every taxpayer dollar must be recovered from failed state Obamacare exchanges, and federal and state agencies should be made accountable for the exchanges' failures. *The Daily Signal* is also [critical](#) of Obamacare, writing Wednesday that if UnitedHealthcare does end up pulling out of state health insurance exchanges, Obamacare could end up limiting the insurance options for people in 34 states.



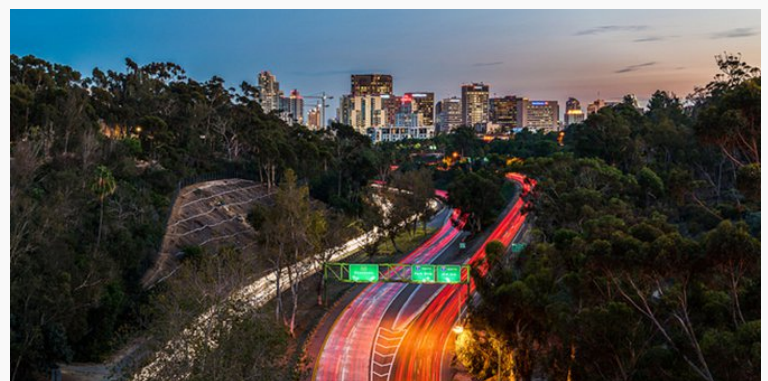
Credit: Fibonacci Blue (Flickr, CC-BY-2.0)

Wonkblog [writes](#) this week on a House bill which aims to speed up drug approvals. They comment that the bill could backfire as drugs often do need longer testing phases to determine how effective they are at treating conditions.

The economy and society

On Saturday, *American Thinker* [argues](#) that another economic crisis is on the way, blaming the Federal Reserve and its power. They say by setting very low interest rates, the Fed creates an environment where money is misallocated, repeatedly causing a bubble-bust cycle. With rates already low, the comment, there will be little the Fed can do if and when another crisis occurs.

With Black Friday approaching, *The American Prospect* [investigates](#) how Walmart could afford to pay its workers \$15 an hour. They say that while increasing workers' pay cuts into the company's profit in the short term, it will make the company – and the economy – stronger in the long term.



Credit: Justin Brown (Flickr, CC-BY-NC-SA-2.0)

Did highways destroy America's cities? *The Atlantic* [thinks so](#). But will removing them revitalise urban areas?

This fall has seen protests across many college campuses, with demonstrators campaigning for their universities to become 'safe spaces' free of racism and other forms of discrimination. *The Fix* [says](#) that to many, the protestors' demands seem to be at odds with the principles of free speech; they explain that according to a recent survey, many Millennials are likely to endorse the censorship of offensive comments about minorities.

On Monday, *Wonkblog* reports on [new data](#) which shows that in 2014 – for the first time – police confiscated more property from Americans than burglars did. Civil asset forfeitures raised \$5 billion in 2014, while burglary losses were \$3.5 billion.

With the ongoing debate over Syrian refugees, *The Federalist* has [five ways](#) that Americans could really help them, including rethinking the country's position on intervention.

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